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ABSTRACT

The seven major articles in this journal issue are devoted to literature and to literary analysis. The articles deal with the following topics: (1) collapse and regeneration in Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself," (2) freedom and identity in "Invisible Man," (3) the character of St. John Rivers in "Jane Eyre," (4) integrating poetry study and composition exercises through the use of paraphrase, (5) drama between 1650 and 1870, (6) teaching topic sentences, and (7) evaluating novels for young adults. (FL)

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

"All my life I had been looking for something... I was looking for myself and asking everyone except myself questions which I, and only I, could answer."

—*Invisible Man*

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For the Record

THE ENGLISH RECORD is published quarterly (Fall, Winter, Spring, and Summer) by the New York State English Council, an association of teachers of English language and literature. *The English Record* now incorporates the former *NYSEC Newsletter.*

MANUSCRIPTS on all aspects of English are invited. Manuscripts should be typed, double-spaced, and should include documentation within the text whenever possible. Manuscripts will be returned only if accompanied by an addressed envelope with sufficient postage enclosed.

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THE NEXT ISSUE of The English Record, the Spring 1981 issue, will appear about the middle of June. The theme will be The English Teacher and the Law.

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Editors' Notes

If the many journals we subscribe to are any indication, literature is "out" these days and composition is "in." Even when literature is mentioned, the focus seems to be on how to teach it or whether to teach it, with little attention given to the traditional concern of English, the analysis of literary works. Of course, plenty of journals still exist which specialize in literature, but the generalist magazines for English teachers seem to have lost interest.

If this trend is understandable in view of the present "crisis in composition," it is also unfortunate because, we suspect, most English teachers have not lost their interest in literature. Therefore, we are devoting this issue to literature and have included several essays of literary analysis.

Since we receive more articles on literature than any journal could possibly publish, we have some guidelines for what we select. Most important, we prefer articles about pieces of literature that teachers of general courses in high school and college are probably teaching. Thus the articles can be immediately useful to practicing teachers.

Secondly, we prefer that the article concentrate on the "major" ideas of the literary work and not just pick at some minor point. Minor points may be of interest to specialists in the genre or period, but most practicing teachers are generalists.

Thirdly, we attempt to choose those articles which give "reasonable" interpretations of the work. We depend on consultants to help us in this area because, in most cases, we have not ourselves read the works in question recently. If our readers say that the interpretation is reasonable (and well-defended) we accept their judgment.

Finally, it almost goes without saying that the articles must be clear and well-written.

We believe that the articles published in this issue meet these criteria and hope that you will find them useful and enlightening.

Also in this issue is what we hope is the beginning of a new feature—commentary on literature for "young adults." Complaints about this category of literature from high school teachers, school librarians and English education professors recently began to reach our ears. The complaint seems to be that most examples of this type of literature are, well, not very literary, and that teachers need some help in selecting the few nuggets from a large amount of slag. *The English Record* was asked for help in the smelting.

Since we obviously are not qualified to say anything worthwhile on the topic, Naomi Katcher agreed to coordinate the effort. The first article on the topic is included in this issue. If Naomi calls you to help, we hope that you will give as generously of your time as our first guest reviewer, John Higgins, has done.

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ROBERTS W. FRENCH

THE VOICE OF THE PROPHET: COLLAPSE AND REGENERATION IN "SONG OF MYSELF"

IT IS WIDELY RECOGNIZED that Walt Whitman's readings in the Bible were a major influence in determining the kind of poet he was to become.[1] Jesus and the Old Testament prophets were particularly significant, for the concerns of prophecy came to be central to Whitman's concept of poetry. In the 1855 Preface to *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman described the ideal poet in terms of prophetic power, as an inspired spiritual leader who would do no less for his people than to "indicate the path between reality and their souls."[2] Such is precisely what the poet of "Song of Myself" intends to do.

The reader of this poem immediately senses the extraordinary character of the speaker. Urgent, unrelenting, often outrageous in its claims, the voice comes at us with eloquent force, it states boldly, without reserve or equivocation:

I celebrate myself and sing myself,
And what I assume you shall assume,
For every atom belonging to me as good as belongs to you.[3]

The voice is that of a man possessed. He has had a vision that will not let him go; it has taken hold of him and changed his life. Like the Old Testament prophets, the poet of "Song of Myself" must proclaim what has been revealed to him. Silence would be intolerable, for part of the experience of the vision is the necessity of making it known.[4] The poet's knowledge is godlike, extending beyond human limitations; he has been granted a glimpse into the center of things, and thus he can say to his listeners, "Stop this day and night with me and you shall possess the origin of all poems...."

The transforming vision that allows him to make such a claim is described in section 5 of "Song of Myself," where a single intense moment leads to universal and essential knowledge:

Swiftly arose and spread around me the peace and knowledge that pass all the argument of the earth,
And I know that the hand of God is the promise of my own,
And I know that the spirit of God is the brother of my own,
And that all the men ever born are also my brothers, and the women my sisters and lovers,
And that a kelson of the creation is love,
And limitless are leaves stiff or drooping in the fields,
And brown ants in the little wells beneath them,
And mossy scabs of the worm fence, heap'd stones, elder, mullein and poke-weed.

The merging of body and soul, physical and spiritual, has brought the poet to a new awareness of existence; he has gone to the center and found there, as Dante did, the love that moves the sun and other stars. From this experience comes the prophetic force that generates "Songs of Myself."

There is a problem, however. The prophet may be a mediator between God and man, and he may be godlike in that he speaks from divine knowledge and divine revelation, but he remains distinctly human for all that, with all attendant human weaknesses, all human fears and emotions, and all human sympathies. These human qualities pose a constant threat to his prophetic role, for as he descends into the merely human, he becomes more remote from God or the source of his inspiration; and to be wholly human is to cease to be the prophet. From Moses onward, prophets of the Old Testament found their humanity coming into conflict with their prophetic missions; and the poet of "Song of Myself," who would be a prophet, is troubled in precisely the same way.

II

In general, early sections of the poem stress the poet's apprehension of his universe: the grass, the sea, the sky, the earth, other human beings. The poet is looking outward and focusing on his relationships to the world outside himself; he tells stories, catalogs human activities, examines nature, and finds meanings in what he perceives. Section 24, however, indicates a new beginning; for here the poet turns inward to explore himself. For the first time he gives his name, stressing at the same time his sensuality; "Walt Whitman, a kosmos, of Manhattan the son /Turbulent, sensual, eating, drinking and breeding..." Shortly afterward he proclaims his credo: "I believe in the flesh and the appetites,/Seeing, hearing, feeling are miracles, and each part and tag of me is a miracle."

The next five sections (25-29) may be seen as a commentary on the credo of section 24. Section 24 presents the poet's sensory repose to the dawn ("Dazzling and tremendous how quick the sun-rise would kill me,/If I could not now and always send sun-rise out of me"), and section 26 celebrates hearing ("Now I will do nothing but listen,/To accrue what I hear into this song, to let sounds

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Born and raised in New York City, Roberts W. French is currently Professor of English and Director of Graduate Studies in English at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst.

contribute toward it"). Section 27 introduces the sense of touch; somewhat ominously, it calls attention to the poet's extraordinary sensitivity:

Mine is no callous shell,
I have instant conductors all over me whether I pass or stop,
They seize every object and lead it harmlessly through me.
I merely stir, press, feel with my fingers, and am happy,
To touch my person to someone else's is about as much as I can stand.

Section 28 follows naturally from the previous section, for it too deals with touch, but something has gone wrong. The poet has been celebrating sensory experience; now he is overwhelmed by it:

Is this then a touch? quivering me to a new identity,
Flames and ether making a rush for my veins,
Treacherous tip of me reaching and crowding to help them . . . . . .
. . . . . .
I am given up by traitors,
I talk wildly, I have lost my wits, I and nobody else am the greatest traitor,
I myself went first to the headland, my own words carried me there.

The prophetic mission is in danger. Sensuality has sent forth its strongest weapon, Touch, and it has—at least for the time—prevailed; the poet talks "wildly" and loses himself in sensual frenzy. He becomes merely human, all too human. The prophet is overcome.

The crisis is resolved somewhere between sections 28 and 29. The former ends with the poet firmly in the grips of

touch: "You villain touch! what are you doing? my breath is tight in its throat,/Unclench your floodgates, you are too much for me." The latter section begins with the departure of touch: "Blind loving wrestling touch, sheath'd hooded sharp-tooth'd touch!/Did it make you ache so, leaving me?" Somehow the poet has escaped. Regaining tranquility, he finds the words to describe his experience:

Parting track'd by arriving, perpetual payment of perpetual loan,
Rich showering rain, and recompense richer afterward,
Landscapes projected masculine, full-sized and golden.

The language is concrete, metaphorical, suggestive. The experience described seems to have been sexual in its nature and intensity; or if not explicitly sexual, certainly akin to the sexual in that it attains ease only after reaching full climax. The fit passes; the implication, however, is that its passing is only temporary, for the prophet is not to be freed from his human nature.

III

By section 30 the crisis has subsided, and the language achieves calm and stability as the poet resumes his prophetic role of guide and teacher. Apparently putting his house in order and regaining self-control after the confusions he has passed through, he reiterates his beliefs and reaffirms his commitments:

All truths wait in all things,
They neither hasten their own delivery nor resist it... (sect. 30)
I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the journey-work of the stars.... (sec. 31).

Escaped from the trap of his sensuality, the poet proceeds with confidence, unaware of the more dangerous trap that lies ahead. In sections 31-33 he moves through the natural world, delighting in its luxuriant vegetation and in the pageantry of its animals; then at line 773 he enters the realm of human activities, passing from the conical firs "Through the gymnasium, through the curtain'd saloon, through the office or public hall...." He participates in varied experience as he ranges through space and time; he explores new realms of evil and suffering. Nothing is too much for him:

Agonies are one of my changes of garments,
I do not ask the wounded person how he feels, I myself become the wounded person,
My hurts turn livid upon me as I lean on a cane and observe. (sect. 33)

The poet's attitude toward evil and suffering in this section shows that his perspective is again godlike, and he is ready to take the universe as he finds it, with everything in its place. This attitude represents a significant development in spiritual growth; but it also presents a considerable danger. By allowing himself to participate imaginatively in the agonies of his people, the poet may be overwhelmed by a flow of human sympathy so strong as to incapacitate him for his prophetic mission. Such is exactly what happened to Moses, who came close to an emotional breakdown over the suffering of the Hebrews (Num. 11:10-15). Similarly, Jeremiah was at one point so struck by the sorrows around him that he collapsed into inconsolable weeping: "Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people" (Jer. 9:1). It is only for God to remain unmoved.

In section 33, however, the poet is still firmly in control as he takes part in varied human experience without becoming absorbed in it. Significantly, the next three sections (34-36) are narratives of violence and courage: the murder of the 412 young men and the battle at sea. With restraint the poet speaks of adversity and death. The end of the sea-fight story, however, is not about triumph, but about pain:

The hiss of the surgeon's knife, the gnawing teeth of his saw,
Wheeze, cluck, swash of falling blood, short wild scream, and long, dull, tapering groan,
These so, these irretrievable.

Thus the section ends: and from this scene of suffering and loss the poet moves into a section (37) where he merges with the identities of losers, outcasts, and rejects of society. Right at the start he recognizes a threat to his stability:

You laggards there on guard! look to your arms!
In at the conquer'd doors they crowd; I am possess'd!
Embody all presences outlaw'd or suffering,
See myself in prison shaped like another man,
And feel the dull unintermitted pain.

The crisis has returned, in a different form. Human senses pose one threat, human sympathy another; here, human sympathy has come to dominate godlike objectivity. The poet is again lost in the merely human; and at the end of section 37 he is left an outcast, a beggar, powerless and impotent:

Askers embody themselves in me and I am embodied in them,
I project my hat, sit shame-faced, and beg.

The transformation is complete. The poet now embodies the "askers" from whom he had turned aside in section 4; he is filled with questions and doubt. Gone is the defiant, assertive, joyous celebrant of earlier sections; again the poem collapses as the poet succumbs to his humanity and abandons his prophetic mission.

In section 38 the poet attains a complete recovery; he regains lost energy and resumes his prophetic role as guide and teacher. The beginning of the section, however, was inauspicious and ominous in its violence:

Enough! enough! enough!
Somehow I have been stunn'd. Stand back!
Give me a little time beyond my cuff'd head, slumbers, dreams gaping,
I discover myself on the verge of a usual mistake.

That I could forget the mockers and insults!
That I could forget the trickling tears and the blows of the bludgeons and hammers!
That I could look with a separate look on my own crucifixion and bloody crowning.

Here, if anywhere, is the central crisis of "Song of Myself." The poet is immersed in his own suffering. Oppressed by the weight of his humanity, he knows only pain without redemption. Life has become a burden. Still, even in his pain he is groping toward recovery, for he recognizes that he is succumbing to a "usual mistake," that of complete absorption in his humanity with its consequent limiting of perspective.[5] The poet cannot now find a benevolent universal order; his focus has narrowed to exclude all but the self, and he sees the self only in the most fragmentary way, as if there were nothing beyond his misery. Overcome by self-pity, he is stunned, helpless, incapacitated—but only momentarily, for recovery comes in the very next lines:

I remember now,
I resume the overstaid fraction,
The grave of rock multiplies what has been confided to it, or to any graves,
Corpses rise, gashes heal, fastenings roll from me.

He is freed as if from the tomb; with renewed power he rises in triumph. The prophetic mission is joyously confirmed and continued. From this point on, "Song of Myself" will be positive, outgoing, assertive, assured. While the cause of this regeneration may not at first be evident, the pattern of recovery is common to works of religious literature and spiritual autobiography. As the individual persists in error, a sudden moment of illumination reveals his misguided state of mind for what it is and shows him, moreover, how in his spiritual darkness he has actually been moving toward the light. The classic example, of course, is that of Paul, transformed in an instant from persecutor of the early Christians to their most eloquent leader (Acts 9:1-9). By indirections are directions found out.

In section 37 of "Song of Myself" the poet falls into depths of self-pity and despair; his situation overwhelms him. Although in the past he has asserted the goodness of existence and emphasized its benevolent designs, he now feels abandoned, beaten down, destitute, a beggar and a sufferer. He has lost sight of the vision that originally inspired and sustained him; the revelation once granted to him has been forgotten. The sadness of existence, with its injustices and its pains, fills his mind to the exclusion of all else; he is sunk in his Slough of Despond. And then, when he is most in need of help, help comes; for memory has not forsaken him.

The crisis may appear to be resolved with ridiculous ease, the turning point coming with the words, "I remember now." But that is precisely the way in which crises such as this are resolved. Memory asserts itself and restores the perspective that brings calm acceptance and renewed power; there is nothing unusual or unprecedented in Whitman's account. Religious literature is full of similar experiences.[6] Such restorations come with astonishing suddenness; that is their very nature. In "Song of Myself" the poet is moved instantly from despair to renewed vitality; and as he states "I troop forth replenish'd with supreme power," the transformation is complete. Jauntily he takes up again his prophet role of guide and teacher: "Eleves, I salute you! come forward!/Continue your annotations, continue your questionings."

IV

Significantly, the following section (39) presents a picture of ideal health and vitality in the "friendly and flowing savage"; his own restoration accomplished, the poet can hold up models to be emulated. From this section to the end, "Song of Myself" is unbroken celebration. All crises have been resolved; the poet is in full control, and he speaks with passionate confidence. As he closes his poem in sections 48-52, he recalls his major themes:

I have said that the soul is not more than the body,
And I have said that the body is not more than the soul,
And nothing, not God, is greater to one than one's self is....

He celebrates existence and the physical world ("I hear and behold God in every object"); he dismisses Death with casual unconcern ("And as to you Death, and you bitter hug of mortality, it is idle to try to alarm me"). He summarizes for his intended audience:

Do you see O my brothers and sisters?
It is not chaos or death—it is form, union, plan—it is eternal life—it is Happiness.

In the subtly modulated final section, the poet takes his leave. He speaks as God's true representative, nowhere and everywhere, always accessible ("If you want me again look for me under your boot-soles"). He promises, like Second Isaiah, to be a source of strength and renewal; whatever may happen he will not be far to seek:

Failing to fetch me at first keep encouraged.
Missing me one place search another,
I stop somewhere waiting for you.

These are his final words. The way to this conclusion has been achieved with difficulty, but it is all the more genuine for that. The poet has been to the center, he has been lost in depths of despair, and he has returned; now he stands calmly waiting, poised in the certainty of prophetic knowledge.

Notes

[1]As Gay Wilson Allen has remarked in *A Reader's Guide to Walt Whitman* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1970), "No book is more conspicuous in Walt Whitman's 'long foreground' than the King James Bible" (p.24).

[2]Whitman, Preface to 1855 *Leaves of Grass*, *Collected Writings*, II 403. Whitman's concept of the poet is of course also derived from Emerson, especially from Emerson's essay, "The Poet."

[3]All quotations of Whitman's poetry are from *Leaves of Grass*, ed. Sculley Bradley and Harold W. Blodgett (New York: W.W. Norton, 1973).

[4]The experience of Jeremiah is revealing. In a fit of anger against God he resolved to give up prophecy ("Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name"); he found, however, that such restraint was impossible ("But his word was in mine heart, as a burning fire shut up in my bones"). See Jer. 20:9.

[5]James E. Miller, Jr., has suggested in *A Critical Guide to Leaves of Grass* (1957; rpt. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), p. 25, that the "usual mistake" is "the exclusion of the Divine, the infinite"—a condition that must necessarily accompany an exclusive focus on the human.

[6]See, for example, John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, in *Grace Abounding and The Life and Death of Mr. Badman* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1953), p. 65, and George Fox, *The Journal of George Fox*, ed. Rufus M. Jones (New York: Capricorn Books, 1963), p.82.

■

KATHERINE M. JONES LOHEYDE

FREEDOM AND IDENTITY IN *INVISIBLE MAN*

RALPH ELLISON'S *Invisible Man* combines the epic quest theme with the Bildungsroman tradition. The archetypal migration from the agrarian south to the industrial north is juxtaposed with the mythic search for identity by the nameless protagonist. For Ellison, that identity is inexorably tied to freedom. The education of the main character consists of discarding the illusions which impede his search for self knowledge.

Reflection on the events of the novel is from an aesthetic distance, because, as in *Catcher in the Rye*, the story is narrated by the protagonist who has reached some sort of asylum outside of mainstream existence. (Holden narrates his tale from the safety of an institution; the protagonist here tells his story from a cellar outside of Harlem.) In each case, the novel's events are seen through the mind of a narrator who has experienced the whole plot, which is unfolded for the reader as a sustained flashback. The frame of the present encircles a modern Bildungsroman relating the development and education of the protagonist.

The narrator undergoes a series of experiences with expectations based on illusion; each episode is followed by the hard-hitting disillusion of reality. The plot therefore crescendos and decrescendos, intermingled with strange dreamlike interludes of surrealism. Central elements are repeated throughout: the myth, the dream, the public stance presented through speechmaking and the private stance demonstrated through action, the woman mother-whore and the symbolic death and rebirth. This pattern is repeated in the five settings in the novel: the protagonist's small southern town in which the Battle Royal takes place; the all-Black college with its antithesis—the Golden Day bar and whorehouse; the northern industrial setting of New York City where the Liberty Paint Company is located; the organizational community of the Communist Brotherhood; and the chaotic scenes of lack of community represented by Ras and Rhinehart.

In each section, the protagonist is presented with some possibility for success: in the fight, that success is physical; in college, it's intellectual; in the Liberty Paint Company, technological; the Brotherhood, political; and in the section with Ras and Rhinehart, social—represented through disintegration and chaos. The protagonist idealistically struggles to live by the commandments of whatever his immediate social group is and consequently is undone by the hypocrisy built into the social structure and plunges into despair. Ultimately, he knows this, as he relates at the beginning of Chapter One:

> All my life I had been looking for something, and everywhere I turned someone tried to tell me what it was. I accepted their answers too, though they were often in contradiction and even self-contradictory. I was naive. I was looking for myself and asking everyone except myself questions which I, and only I, could answer.[1]

Through the course of the novel, he realizes "I am nobody but myself." Before reaching the "success" of this finding, he literally plunges into a grave-like hole and hibernates like Jack the Bear.

In the beginning scenes, we see the protagonist in an initiation rite in which he comes to know the sado-sexuality of the white southerners who are here the oppressors, the "Them" who cause a paranoid Buckeye the Rabbit reaction in the adolescent who is forced to fight against his peers in the ring. He loses out of humility and nonresistance; because blindfolded, he discovers he "has no dignity." He later learns the connection between sight and dignity, as he reflects on all those blind or shortsighted people he meets, and their lack of essential human dignity. In the ring, however, he passes the "test"—the rites of passage—through his humility, living a naive interpretation of his grandfather's last words: "overcome 'em with yesses."

Proud of his recognition by community leaders, the narrator expects to give a speech on the social responsibility of the black people to cultivate friendly relations with the Southern white man. After the violence of the fight itself, the pain of the electric rug which shocked the boys who tried to get their money, and the lewd sexuality of the townsmen and the naked blond dancer, he, beaten and injured, accidentally recommends social equality as he—without irony—admits that the part "about equality was a mistake" as he says "Oh, yes sir...I was swallowing blood."

Later that evening, overjoyed with the scholarship and the briefcase and ignoring the public humiliation of the battle, the protagonist dreams about his grandfather. In the dream, the boy and man were at the circus where no matter what the circus clowns did, the

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grandfather refused to laugh. The protagonist will later learn not to laugh at or with clowns whose humor is at his expense, be they real people or the paper clown of the dancing Sambo doll. His dream shifts to the prophetic, as he sees himself opening letters, which his grandfather tells him are years, only to find at the end the message: "To Whom It May Concern—Keep This Nigger-boy Running."

The underlying issues of the first section of the novel are seen again and again through the parallel and juxtaposed scenes and situations which follow through the book. The boy's speech is the first of many: Homer, Barbee, Ras, the union leader and, of course, the protagonist himself continue to offer public statements to very different audiences, and with very different effects.

Likewise, the importance of the recurring dreams in the novel is apparent: the message in the many letters to "keep this Nigger-boy running" will be that of Bledsoe in real life when the protagonist gets expelled from college, ironically for continuing to play the game by the white man's rules. The effects of characters acting upon their dreams is dramatically demonstrated in the Trueblood incident in which the Black cabin dweller has intercourse with his daughter as a result of a dream. That Trueblood sins and survives—in fact, thrives—shocks Mr. Norton, the white trustee of the college, who has only partially subliminated his own incestuous attraction to his daughter.

Norton needs a stimulant after this shock; the college boy takes him to the Golden Day, a tavern populated with mad veterans and whores. Here, we find that in the same way that the unnamed protagonist is invisible to others, he cannot see Norton: the trustee's face is "a mass of whiteness," a "nameless horror." The model student with no identity and repressed emotions and the white trustee hear from the mad doctor the implications of the "white is right" theory so unctuously followed by the protagonist at this point. As the young man drives Norton back to the Eden of the college, he recognizes that he is about to lose the only identity he had ever known. "In this brief moment of passage," the narrator tells us, "I became aware of the connection between these lawns and buildings and my hopes and dreams." Full of pride, and, in fact, motivated solely by narrow self-interest, he is ashamed of his color tie with the symbolically named Trueblood.

Parallel situations in each episode are juxtaposed and repeated throughout the five sections which make up the novel. In each, idealism based on an illusion of reality ends in a shattering of expectations. First the white southerners, and now black and white together in Norton and Dr. Bledsoe, represent the deceit and duplicity that the naive protagonist has not yet learned to anticipate. The new Adam, expelled from paradise, still accepts and praises the impositions of the whites and insists that he is content with them. His expulsion from college is an emancipation from the South, but not from the Uncle Tom blacks, the inaccurate vision of hope through endurance that Homer Barbee, blinder than his namesake, gives to the students, nor from the whites who see him only as a representative of the race. The archetypal migration and metamorphosis of a southern rural black progressing to the promised land of Harlem is here the quest of the nameless voyager in search for a name and the self it symbolizes. The mythic and epic lines of the story reveal the No-man who is Everyman in search of the unseen reality beneath the surface of things. Marcus Klein describes the book's movement as "to confirm again and again that the hero doesn't exist, and Ellison's difficulty...is to resurrect the hero for each subsequent adventure."[2]

Once in New York, a descent into the hellish basements of the Liberty Paint Factory with "If it's optic white, It's the Right White," emblazoned on the roof, leads to further misidentity: the protagonist is called a fink, then a radical; and at this point he's neither. However, his perceptions are still erroneous: he thinks Lucius Brockway has stabbed him when he has a fight with the old man, when in fact he has bitten him. Reminiscent of the power at the college, and foreshadowing the Monopolated Light & Power Company through which the protagonist lights his cave, is the boiler of the paint company which blows up in a description much like Trueblood's dream of running through the clock. The protagonist has not watched the gauges, and as he grabs the white one, he increases the pressure instead of decreasing it and causes the explosion. As he loses consciousness, he is

"numb with the sense that (he) had lost irrevocably an important victory."

The electrotherapy machine in which he finds himself next is reminiscent of the electric rug at the Battle Royal. Resembling a mechanical womb, the machine is symbolic of the mechanical society which imprisons the anti-hero. Suffering from amnesia, the protagonist is awakened by the doctor who attempts to construct a subservient identity on the narrator's *tabula rasa*. He tries to build a heroic identity, recapitulating the narrator's existence as a Black with folk myths of Buckeye and Brer Rabbit and Jack the Bear, who as Critic Schafer points out, are emblematic of survival in Black lore.[3] However, the narrator has now split into two selves—his old invisible one, and a lower self which is still intact and able to surface after electroshock.

During this mechanical and historical-mythical resurrection, the protagonist finally learns the lesson he will not forget through the duration of the novel:

> "I wanted freedom . . . I could no more escape than I could think of my identity. Pehaps, I thought, the two things are involved with each other. When I discover who I am, I'll be free.

With his freedom, when it finally comes, is acknowledgement of his invisibility.

Mary, the savior mother, provides stability during a period when the protagonist comes to grips with his past cultural heritage. Originally, he would not permit himself the southern breakfast of pork chops which he really wanted; later he eats hot yams on the streets. However, later still, the yams are frostbitten and bitter, and the thought of Mary's cabbage becomes itself oppressive. He shatters her bank with the grinning black boy eating coins and leaves her, knowing that the identity through the folk myth and southern tradition is not enough. However, his failure to embrace his *actual* past and racial identity remain his central problem.

The fourth section offers the possibility of the political life, with its scientific organization. Again the protagonist undertakes a symbolic descent into hell as he first goes to the Chthonian hotel, the inner earth, with gods and spirits of the underworld. We see that the protagonist has learned Bledsoe's lesson well, as he lies to the whites, telling them exactly what they want to hear. The communist Brotherhood, the organization which supports him, assigns him a name, a new identity. The Brotherhood is concerned with mass, not the individual, and Emma's comment regarding the new brother is only, "Don't you think he should be a little blacker?" Later, the protagonist sees Brother Clifton's defection from the brotherhood as a betrayal when he finds the Black youth leader selling dancing Sambo paper dolls on the street corner. Why Clifton had turned to peddle obscenities was beyond his understanding, as he asks himself, "Why did he choose to plunge into nothingness, into the void of faceless faces, of soundless voices, lying outside history?" He fails to understand "outside of history" in the brotherhood sense and continues forgetting or ignoring his own past which gives him his identity.

Clifton is killed; as the protagonist gives the funeral oration he sees not the crowd but the faces of individual men and women. Clifton has not betrayed the invisible man. He found, as the invisible man shall find, that reality lies behind the nothingness and void, and that knowledge of self may lie "outside of history."

It is instead the glass-eyed Jack who betrays the invisible man. The abstract principles and historical movements which characterize the communist party are opposed by the protagonist after the riot in Harlem. The Harlem Blacks were not the receptive and passive group that the party had supposed, and the narrator is not in favor of the class warfare or race riots. When Jack loses control of the narrator, he betrays him.

Two social possibilities are presented through Ras the Exhorter and Rhinehart and with these possibilities lie the traps of disintegration and chaos. Ras is Ras the destroyer who offers the assurance of one undivided Black identity. The narrator recognizes the potential for stability in the views of the nationalist, but Ras is another who keeps him running. Rhinehart, for whom the protagonist is mis-identified, is the chameleon, the tempter, Brer Fox. Ellison said he chose the name Rhinehart for its suggestion of inner and outer, the rind and the heart, seeming and being—thereby an emblem of chaos. Rhinehart offers assurance through many shifting identities. In this flux, this fluid state, Rhinehart presents the possiblity of freedom without responsibility.

Later, in his hole the protagonist destroys each item in his briefcase, each a remnant of some part of his past life: his high school diploma, Clifton's Sambo doll, the betrayal letter from Jack, and the paper on which Jack has written his Brotherhood name. The fight between submission and rebellion is over. The protagonist has broken with the institutions and authorities of the past and emerges into an epoch of personal freedom and individual moral responsibility. His tale is told by a man "invisible in his impotent self-knowledge, looking back on his visible innocence."[4] We therefore have the frame of the present encircling the "education," the development, of the protagonist. Through the five major circumstances of his past life he acts on expectations based on illusion, and errs. Instead of learning from his mistakes, he often makes the same errors again, accepting solutions offered by others. His rebellion and self-assertion lead him to discover that he is invisible; his life underground in hibernation assures him that he is not blind. As he emerges from his hole—which he will—he will know his identity with certitude, and will perceive at last his relation to the world.

Notes

[1]Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*, New York: Vintage, 1952, p. 13.

[2]Marcus Klein, *After Alienation: American Novels in Mid-Century*, New York: The World Publishing Company, 1964.

[3]William J. Schafer, "Irony From Underground—Satiric Elements in *Invisible Man*" in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Invisible Man*, ed. by John M. Reilly, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1970, p. 40.

[4]William J. Schafer, "Ralph Ellison and the Birth of the Anti-Hero," in *Ralph Ellison*, ed. by John Jersey, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1974, p. 116. ■

BETTY H. JONES

MOOR HOUSE REVISITED:

ANOTHER LOOK AT ST. JOHN RIVERS

TO CRITICS AND students of Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, it is a commonplace to note that Rochester and St. John serve as structural and thematical antitheses, with the "fire" of Rochester in sharp contrast to the "ice" of St. John.[1] But curiously enough, what has not been previously discussed, is that the "ice" of St. John's character is carefully wrought, fashioned and formed by an intense deliberation and will, and is no more his "true" nature than it is Macbeth's or Milton's Satan's "true" nature to act without hesitation in the service of evil. Indeed, to say that St. John by "nature" is "cold," is as much a misstatement as to say that Macbeth before his meeting with the witches was "evil," or that Lucifer, Lord of Light, knew evil as a natural attribute before he learned of the Son's elevation.

It is far closer to the truth to recognize that St. John's final rendering of himself as a self-made creature of ice represents altogether as false an attachment as that of Macbeth or Lucifer. The St. John of Moor House as we first meet him is analogous to Macbeth *after* he has become "in blood/Stepped in so far that .../ Returning were as tedious as go O'er" (III. iv. 136-38).[2] Further, this St. John is spiritually akin to Satan (no longer Lucifer) who, momentarily charmed by the beauty of goodness, gazes wistfully from his perch in the Tree of Life at the unsuspecting pair frolicking in their prelapsarian paradise.[3] And as he watches, Satan for more than an instant longs for the God to whom he can never return, for those regions of light he can never again inhabit. All that was once good in him would let the couple remain in peace in Eden, but pride wounded, ambition rebuked, and finally and most importantly, a newfound commitment to evil, will not allow him to waver from his goal. The memory of what he was together with the recognition of what he now must be, afford a constant and peculiar torment to the fallen arch-angel.

Macbeth too, early in his embrace of evil, had keen remembrances of the Macbeth Duncan had in former golden times with true love regarded. Those same memories made his "seated heart knock" at his ribs when he contemplated those acts to be perpetrated "against the use of nature" (I. iii. 136-37), that is to say, against Macbeth's own nature. It is certainly true that the ambiguity present in the tormented figures of Macbeth and Satan is the source of much of the power of their characterizations. To fail to see that there is a similar ambiguity, a similar complexity, present in the psyche of St. John, even though his dedication is to "good," is to miss much of the truth of Charlotte Bronte's work.

For a clearer understanding of St. John's nature, it is necessary to turn to the imagery of the novel. The ice of Lowood reappears in reference to St. John, a fact that has long given rise to the common interpretations of his significance in the novel. For example, coming in out of a "frozen hurricane," St. John, with a face like "chiselled marble," stands before Jane "all white as a glacier."[4] In this scene he describes himself as "hard and cold." Earlier, he had stated that "Reason, and not Feeling," was his guide (III. vi. 478), and he is told to reiterate this statement in some form throughout Jane's stay at Moor House. In terms of the values previously established in *Jane Eyre*, it is apparent that St. John's conception of "reason" is linked with the spurious deadly "reason" and ice of the Reverend Brocklehurst's Lowood. Jane, a creature of spirit and fire, whose personal journey toward self-mastery and maturity is marked by the gradual recognition of the *right* reason that would temper, not destroy, acknowledges the Thanatos in St. John when she tells him: "If I were to marry you, you would kill me. You are killing me now" (III. ix. 526).

And as though in tacit recognition of the rightness of Jane's perception, it is instructive to note that the cold, austere, self-styled ascetic who aspires to "save" souls, is yoked in the novel with images of decay and death. His patrimony will consist of a "crumbling grange," with "scathed" firs behind it and "yew-trees" in front (III. iv. 451). This use of imagery would seem ironical indeed if it were not realized that St. John himself is a study in irony. For at the core of this so-called man of "ice" is a highly sensual, highly passionate nature, altogether the equal of Jane's own. It is remarkable that this aspect of his essential self has gone virtually unnoticed, a matter of little moment for readers of *Jane Eyre*.[5]

But the primary fire and passion of St. John's nature ought to be remarked and its implications fully understood. The full enormity of St. John's attempted crime against Jane cannot be perceived until it is recognized that he tries to destroy in her what he has already destroyed in himself: the ability to yield to and delight in the spontaneous outpourings of the human heart, the ability to yield to and

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delight in the spontaneous expression of physical love. St. John himself reveals his original "fire" in the passage describing his fancied encounter with Rosamond Oliver:

> Fancy me yielding and melting, as I am doing: human love rising like a freshly opened fountain in my mind and overflowing with sweet inundation all the field I have so carefully and with such labour, prepared—so assiduously sown with the seeds of good intentions, of self-denying plans. And now it is deluged with a nectarous flood—the young germs swamped—delicious poison cankering them: now I see myself stretched on an ottoman in the drawing-room at Vale Hall, at my bride Rosamond Oliver's feet: she is talking to me with her sweet voice—gazing down on me with those eyes your skilful hand has copied so well—smiling at me with these coral lips. She is mine—I am hers—this present life and passing world suffice to me. Hush! say nothing—my heart is full of delight—my senses are entranced—let the time I marked pass in peace...Now,... that little space was given to delirium and delusion. I rested my temples on the breast of temptation, and put my neck voluntarily under her yoke of flowers; I tasted her cup.
>
> (III. iv. 476)

In a novel occasionally informed with Charlotte Bronte's highly developed sense of irony, it would seem the greatest irony of all that this passage, by far the most erotic in the entire work, should be uttered by St. John, an avowed man of "reason." But as this excerpt clearly shows, strong sexual passion is not foreign to St. John; for this reason, his relation to Jane must be reexamined, taking into account all that is now known of this total nature.

For the author is saying something very important here. Not content with the repression of solely his own sexuality, not content with the mere turning of himself into stone, St. John proposes to do the same to Jane. He would marry her,

> "God and nature intended you for a missionary's wife. It is not personal, but mental endowments they have given you: you are formed for labour, not for love. A missionary's wife you must—shall be. You shall be mine: I claim you—not for my pleasure, but for my Sovereign's service."
>
> (III. viii. 514)

and, in effect, imprison her. To his offer of marriage Jane replies, "Oh, I wish I could make you see how much my mind is at this moment like a rayless dungeon, with one shrinking fear fettered in its depths—the fear of being persuaded by you to attempt what I cannot accomplish" (III. viii. 515). St. John would deny Jane the freedom she needs, the "liberty of mind" she has sought throughout her life. Life with him would be yet another "servitude." An "iron shroud" would contract around her. There would be no "light kindling," no "life quickening." Jane says in her own words, "If I join St. John, I abandon half myself: if I go to India, I go to premature death" (III. viii. 516).

Until this point, much of the novel has focused on Jane's search for her own identity. Yet St. John would require that Jane completely submerge her growing sense of self and yield to the demands of the life he envisions. Blind to the audacity of his demands, he urges Jane to "Simplify your complicated interests, feelings, thoughts, wishes, aims; merge all considerations in one purpose: that of fulfilling with effect—with power—the mission of your great Master" (III. viii. 518). But as Ruth Bernard Yeazell has rightly pointed out, in this novel "so absolutely to identify the self with another—even if that other is God Himself—is to die."[6] St. John's indomitable, *inhuman* thrust toward self-sacrifice enables Jane to see him as "in reality become no longer flesh, but marble; his eye was a cold, bright blue gem; his tongue, a speaking instrument—nothing more" (III. ix. 524). She knows that, "if I were his wife, this...man...could soon kill me" (III. ix. 525).

Jane's immediate realization that she could not long survive a life as St. John's wife, "always restrained, and always checked—forced to keep the fire of...nature continually low, to compel it to burn inwardly" (III. viii. 520-21), gives her the courage to refuse his proposal. St. John is by no means unaware of Jane's need for emotional freedom; rather, he feels that she can learn to rise above it. He would do to her what he has already done to himself. In a very real way, his abortive effort to subjugate Jane is more horrifying than Rochester's willful, but equally fruitless attempt to trick Jane into an unlawful marriage. It is possible to forgive Rochester's transgressions because in a novel where indisputably "the dominant energies and sympathies...are on the side of passion,"[7] it will be remembered that Rochester, at least, was motivated by his true love for Jane. It is to be expected that, given the ethical framework of the novel, Rochester must pay for his unrighteous act; thus, there is the purgative fire of Thornfield. Nevertheless, there remains an understanding and acceptance of Rochester's error as one intensely *human*. Such is not the case with St. John. He knows full well who and what Jane is because he knows himself His is not the forgivable error springing from an excess of passion; on the contrary, he would violate the integrity of Jane's nature coldly, deliberately, and solely because of his own distorted version of "reason."

To some degree, Jane is vulnerable to the appeal to reason because of her own quest for the "Reason" that "sits firm and holds the reins" (II. iv. 252). The affinity shared by the two has been noticed by Terry Eagleton who says that "Even so, there is more than a superficial relationship between Rivers, a rationalist...and Jane's own behaviour...In his fusion of disciplined aloofness and restless desire he is an extreme version of Jane herself."[8] In more ways than he knows, Eagleton is right to say that St. John is an "extreme version of Jane herself." But St. John is not merely a version of Jane in sweet submission to the siren song of reason; he is a version of Jane forcibly wrested from the natural inclinations of half her nature. He is Jane robbed of warmth and joy.

That Jane and St. John share more than a common respect for reason, that indeed the two are both spirited and

passionate, has gone unnoticed because of the outward authority of St. John's adopted "self." Rigid, incontrovertible in his zeal to save the heathen, few would accuse him of "yielding, melting, overflowing, with sweet inundation." Until now, it has been all too easy to say as Earl A. Knies does that, "This man driven by duty to renounce all earthly pleasures is a clear contrast to Rochester and a representative of one side of Jane's personality."[9] In truth, St. John is representative of *both* sides of Jane's personality and is not a "clean" contrast to Rochester at all.

The question is not that simple. There is as much of the primal fire in St. John as there is in Rochester; the difference is, however, that Rochester does not restrain himself and St. John has struggled long to turn himself into a man of ice. Moreover, so uncertain is he that he has succeeded in his battle that he continues to struggle daily for the control he values so greatly. His sisters know that the familiar St. John is but part of the truth only. Diana comments to Jane: "He will sacrifice all to his long-framed resolves....natural affection and feelings more potent still. St. John looks quiet, Jane, but he hides a fever in his vitals. You would think him gentle, yet... he is as inexorable as death...it breaks my heart" (III. iv. 455). Jane herself catches glimpses of an unguarded St. John. Observing an encounter between St. John and Rosamond Oliver, Jane says,

> I saw his solemn eye melt with sudden fire, and flicker with resistless emotion....Flushed and kindled, thus, he looked nearly as beautiful for a man as she for a woman. His chest heaved once, as if his large heart, weary of despotic constriction, had expanded, despite the will, and made a vigorous bound for the attainment of liberty. But he curbed it, I think, as a resolute rider would curb a rearing steed. He responded neither by word or movement to the gentle advances made him.
>
> (III. v. 465)

Urged by Rosamond simply to pay a social call to avoid a lonely evening at home, St. John refuses. Jane remarks that he "spoke almost like an automaton: himself only knew the effort it cost him to refuse" (III. v. 466).

Not surprisingly, Jane worries about St. John's unnatural "firmness and self control," fearing that he may task himself too far by locking "every feeling and pang within" (III. vi. 473). She never doubts that he feels deeply; she does regret that he will not allow himself to express his feeling. And if she were to marry him, he would impose the same unbearable discipline on her. It is important to see that Jane recognizes the ambiguity inherent in the self-tortured St. John. She knows that his icy demeanor is hard won. She says, "I knew his thoughts well, and could read his heart plainly...I conceived an inclination to do him some good, if I could" (III. vi. 473). She can do him no good in this instance. What is more, still clinging to his attachment to Reason, St. John defeats Jane in this skirmish as well:

> "But I apprised you that I was a hard man," said he; "difficult to persuade."
>
> "And I am a hard woman,—impossible to put off."
>
> "And then," he pursued, "I am cold: no fervour infects me."
>
> "Whereas I am hot, and fire dissolves ice."
>
> (III. vii. 489)

But fire does not dissolve ice in the situation above. St. John has done his work too well. Significantly, he had once told Jane, "It is hard work to control the workings of inclination, and *turn the bent of nature: but that it may be done, I know from experience*" (III. v. 461). (italics mine) This passage, together with the one cited earlier, reveal in St. John's own words the deliberate transformation he has undergone. His comments, the observations made of him by his sisters and Jane, combine to form sufficient evidence that conventional views of St. John as simply the antithesis of ice or reason to the fire or passion of Rochester are too narrow to contain the whole truth of this tormented, self-styled man of God. For it is clear that far from being a unidimensional snowman, St. John is a complex, driven figure whose unfortunate understanding of the demands of Reason forces him to violate the integrity of his own soul. Ironically, in the end, the intimations and visions of his God, all that is left for him to give, bring neither joy nor peace to anyone—least of all, to himself.

Endnotes

[1]See, for example, Inga-Stina Ewbank, *Their Proper Sphere* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1966), p. 195. She states that "in the thematic structure of the novel, the St. John Rivers relationship is introduced as the antithesis to Jane's relations with Rochester. Physically, the two men are deliberately contrasted:... The physical contrast is a direct reflection of the spiritual one." M.H. Scargill, in "All Passion Spent: A Revaluation of *Jane Eyre*," *University of Toronto Quarterly*, XIX (1949), 123, asserts that "St. John Rivers is a symbol of the ascetic in contrast to Rochester's symbolization of uncontrolled physical passion." Mark Kinkead-Weekes, in "The Place of Love in *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*," in *The Brontes*, ed. Ian Gregor (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1970), p. 84, calls St. John "the opposite extreme" from Rochester. St. John "is an ice-man."

[2]All quotations from *Macbeth* cited in the text are from Sylvan Barnet, ed., *The Complete Signet Classic Shakespeare* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972).

[3]All references to *Paradise Lost* in the text are from Merrit Y. Hughes, ed., *Milton: Complete Poems and Major Prose* (New York: The Odyssey Press, 1957). This reference is from Book IV 195-393.

[4]*Jane Eyre*, ed. Jane Jack and Margaret Smith, Clarendon ed. (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1969), III. vii. 481. All citations in the text are to this edition. I cite volume, chapter, and page number.

[5]Margot Peters, in *Charlotte Bronte* (Madison: The Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1973), p. 153, notes the eroticism of *Jane Eyre* in general. She quotes briefly from a passage reproduced in this text, but confines her remarks to a passing reference and does not discuss the implications of the passage itself. Although it is possible to find an occasional allusion to St. John's "repressed" impulses, no one has focused on the extraordinary degree of sensuality possessed by this so-called man of ice.

[6]Ruth Bernard Yeazell, "More True than Real: Jane Eyre's 'Mysterious Summons'," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, XXIX (1974), 140.

[7]David Lodge, "Fire and Ice: Charlotte Bronte's War of Earthly Elements," in *The Brontes*, ed. Ian Gregor (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1970), p. 111.

[8]"*Jane Eyre*," in *Myths of Power* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1975), p. 19.

[9]"*Jane Eyre*," in *The Art of Charlotte Bronte* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1969), p. 133.

■

SERENDIPITY

THE PROSE PARAPHRASE: INTEGRATING POETRY AND COMPOSITION

Irwin Weiser

MANY OF US teach compostion courses which demand that we not only instruct our students in writing but that we also present literature to them as well. Such courses often frustrate us, since a quarter or a semester seems too brief to allow us to teach fundamentals of composition alone. How are we to integrate the teaching of literature with the teaching of writing? What are we to do with a fat anthology of essays, fiction, poetry, or drama and a rhetoric text and, in some cases, a separate handbook of grammar and usage?

Recently, I tried an approach which seemed to provide more integration of reading and writing than I previously had felt I attained in similar courses. The course was the third quarter of a required freshman composition sequence; the departmental course description specifies the teaching of poetry and drama, but also states "English 103 is, however, primarily a composition, not a literature, course. Major emphasis of the course should be on writing." The approach I will describe concerns the study of poetry.

Because this is a writing course, I explained to my students that we would approach poetry primarily as a study of the way writers can use language, and thus our work on denotation and connotation, tone, irony, image, and symbol should help them learn to make conscious language choices when they write. Chapters in X.J. Kennedy's *An Introduction to Poetry* 4th ed. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1978) entitled "Words," "Saying and Suggesting," and "Listening to a Voice" fit nicely with this approach. Further, because this is a writing course, I wanted my students to have frequent opportunities to write without burying myself under an even greater number of formal, longish papers than I already required. An appropriate solution seemed to be to have my students write prose paraphrases of one or two poems from those assigned for each discussion class.

During the first week of the course, we discussed and practiced the paraphrase technique, looking first at Kennedy's explanation of paraphrasing and then at this paraphrase of Housman's "Loveliest of Trees, the Cherry Now," (p. 3). In class, we all paraphrased Donald Finkel's "Hands" (p. 7) and read the paraphrases aloud. By forcing students to read aloud on the second day of classes and by deliberately choosing a poem which is more than slightly sexual, I was able to crack the wall of fear and restraint which often keeps students tight-lipped throughout the term. By reading my own paraphrase, not among the ablest in the class, I was able to place myself in the position of co-inquirer into these poems, most of which I had not previously taught. This helped establish a classroom atmosphere similar to that of a creative writing workshop, one conducive to the discussion of both the poetry in the text and the writing of the students. In fact, while the primary purpose of assigning the paraphrases was to give my students extra writing practice, an important additional result was that throughout the quarter their paraphrases, not the teacher's opinions and interpretations, formed the basis for class

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discussion. There was rarely a need for the teacher to *explain* a poem or a passage: someone, and frequently several people, had an interpretation which satisfied most questions and resolved most difficulties.

At the end of this essay are examples of the prose paraphrases students wrote of Emily Dickinson's "I heard a fly buzz—when I died." Two of the paraphrases, at 90 and 112 words, are approximately as long as Dickinson's 92-word poem; the 160-word third paraphrase is over 75% longer because this student interpreted as she paraphrased, explaining, for example, that the narrator willed her earthly possessions in a futile attempt to hasten death. Such interpretation, while welcome, is not at all necessary, as the two shorter, yet also successful, paraphrases indicate. In fact, I had to remind students that paraphrases are not the same as analyses, and that while they might have to interpret a symbol—as these students variously explained what the fly or the King meant—or unweave a metaphor, their major task was to rewrite the poem as clear prose.

The first paraphrase is perhaps the most straightforward of this group. The author's voice is nearly inaudible. He has stripped the poem of its literary qualities—no "Heaves of Storm," only "the air before a storm"; no personification; the author is only present in the choice of the word "sad" to describe the final buzz of the fly. His paraphrase is a prose rendering of the poem with no obvious attempt to interpret it.

Paraphrase II seems to ignore the symbolic importance of the fly, and perhaps in the very casualness of the phrase "and the last thing I was aware of was this fly and its buzz" suggests the same insignificance of death from the perspective of the hereafter that Dickinson does. More interesting is this student's treatment of the willing of the keepsakes: the formal diction of "proper recipients," "standard fashion," and "officially ready to die" suggests death as a ritual. Unexpected interpretations like this appear frequently in the paraphrases, demonstrating the flexibility and richness of language, emphasizing the error in assuming that there is one *right* way to interpret a poem, and sometimes, when the interpretations are less plausible, leading to discussions of what constitutes valid interpretation and how one finds support for interpretations of what one reads.

The third paraphrase, as I suggested before, offers more interpretation as well as a stronger authorial voice than the previous two. The author adds a simile of her own, "as if the winds had ceased temporarily to catch their breaths," and more obviously than the other students uses the fly as a metaphor for death in her final sentence.

I will not take the space for a thorough analysis of these paraphrases, but I think that they suggest what a teacher might expect from this kind of assignment. Clearly, these three students have read this poem carefully and understand what it says, the first step towards understanding what it means. Small group and classroom discussions would allow us to consider these paraphrases individually and comparatively, to point out their merits and weaknesses, and then to return to the original verse with new perspectives.

Most heartening were the comments of several students during the quarter who told me that they felt more confident about reading poetry than they previously had. Though I doubt that my students are any more ardently devoted to poetry now than they were before the course began, they are not intimidated by verse on the page. They have an approach, a simple heuristic, for dealing with any unfamiliar writing. Ideally, my students will remember and use their ability to paraphrase and their ability to use their paraphrases to understand and evaluate what they read when they come upon a particularly difficult passage in their chemistry or history texts during the next three years or in the quarterly reports or technical manuals or journals they will read when they leave the university and begin their careers.

Appendix: Sample Paraphrases

Paraphrase I

I heard death coming on. The stillness in the room was like the stillness in the air before a storm. The people around me had wiped their eyes dry, and they held their breaths waiting for that moment when death could be witnessed in the room. I wrote a will which gave away my possessions—that being the only part of me I could give away. A fly then flew between the light and me making a sad, uncertain buzz. My eyesight failed and I could not see to see.

Paraphrase II

I heard a fly buzz as I was about to die. The sound of the fly broke the quietness in the room which was like the calm before a storm. The people sitting around waiting for me to die cried until they could not cry anymore. They began to breathe uneasily in anticipation of my death when God would come down to the room to take me away. I had willed all of my valuables to the proper recipients in the standard fashion. I was officially ready to die, going through the final dramatic moments of my life, and the last thing I was aware of was this fly and its buzz.

Paraphrase III

I could feel the approach of death just as I could hear the buzz of an approaching fly. I knew death was buzzing around, but I did not know when and where it would land. The stillness of death was like the calmness that exists between storms, as if the winds had ceased temporarily to catch their breaths.

I was aware of the sorrow in the room. There were those who had cried because death was near, and they waited for death to stalk into the room like a king and claim its subject.

I willed all of my earthly possessions, all that could legally be assigned to a new owner, in an attempt to hasten death. But there was no way to control death; I was at the mercy of its timing. And then like the fly that finally lands on its choice place, death fell upon me, and shut my eyes, and I could no longer see. ■

RICHARD L. LOUGHLIN

A BRIEF GUIDE TO DRAMA BETWEEN 1650 AND 1870

BETWEEN 1650 AND 1870, comedy burgeoned. If the ultimate purpose of comedy is to make audiences merry, as Dr. Johnson maintained, this is commendable. Happiness here and hereafter is mankind's indestructible hope. If the Lord loves a cheerful giver, He must cherish a giver of cheerfulness. In creating comedy the dramatist exercises his logical bent. To poke good-natured fun at the follies and foibles of his fellowman, the playwright needs a norm (what *ought* to be) to measure the status quo (the current *mess*).

Great writers of comedy are not only logicians but also freedom fighters, literary liberals. As Northrop Frey observes, "The action of comedy, like the action of the Christian Bible, moves from law to liberty" (*Anatomy of Criticism*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957, p. 181).

If love is the gift of self, as Jacques Maritain maintains—and rightly so—the greatest comedians achieve exalted moral stature by selflessly serving their fellowmen. Sometimes the comic artist even plays the fool, as Oliver Goldsmith often did in real life, to give contemporaries moments of joy. At such times the comedian becomes a lamb of slaughter.

Although the comedies and tragedies of this period are sometimes stretched on the twin Procrustean beds of classicism and romanticism, the great plays escape precise classification, as with all works of genius. "Fists flew and duels were fought between the embattled classicists and the romanticists," writes John Gassner about the Theatre Francais in 1830 (*Introducing the Drama*). "When the struggle was over, the triumph of Victor Hugo and his followers...was complete. This wave of 'poetic,' sentimental romanticism, however, was short-lived, for the pendulum of popular taste swings easily from one extreme to the other."

Everywhere the stage had to struggle for survival, even as today. When in 1660, Charles II and his court returned to England from exile in France, the theaters were empty except for an occasional opera. As in France, only a few theaters were licensed. These the dissolute court commandeered sitting on the stage, brawling in the pit, and making assignations against the background of an ailing stage. To bolster the appeal of amoral comedies and falsely heroic tragedies, producers tried elaborate stage settings and production tricks.

Like baroque Italian court theaters, the new playhouses were decked out with columns, festooned with carved garlands, cupids, and goddesses. They usually had horseshoe-shaped galleries rising tier upon tier to a painted ceiling. (If they had only copied the graceful Asolo theater, probably the original frame of Goldoni's *Mine Mistress*. This gem, brought to America by John Ringling, currently houses one of the best repertory companies in America, in Sarasota, Florida.) As the orchestra seats normally were backless, the favorite accommodations were in the boxes. Although a huge apron projected into the pit, and was used for most of the acting, an ornate proscenium arch framed the stage.

During much of this period the stage floor was slanted, giving birth to the stage directions *upstage* and *downstage*. Actors made exits and entrances through two to six proscenium doors or between the wing pieces, as the sets lacked practical doors. Both the architectural settings of the Italians—introduced by Inigo Jones—and the masques influenced production. In the absence of box sets, wing pieces and shutters in grooves capable of being closed from each side were used to form new sets. Painted backdrops were standard. After the triple overture and prologue, the front curtain was rolled up, to be lowered only after the epilogue.

Because the theaters were roofed, lamps and candles were essential. Chandeliers could be lowered and raised. As foot-candles and lamps were sometimes floated in troughs to prevent fire, the term *floats* for footlights appeared. Devices for dimming and coloring these floats were installed in some theaters. Trick effects were used for wind, rain, hoofbeats, decapitations, and clouds. Trapdoors and elevators became standard equipment in the better playhouses.

Although costumes were elaborate, they were rarely historically correct. For example, Garrick played both *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* in contemporary garb. Although women appeared on stage for the first time, they were rarely ennobling types. Frowning on the "wickedness" of the stage, the average citizen withheld support.

In 1698, Jeremy Collier attacked the "immorality" of the stage. By virtue of the brilliant and circumspect writing of Goldsmith and Sheridan, improvement was slowly

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accomplished. In addition, esteemed performers like David Garrick, Mrs. Siddons, and Edmund Keen ejected disruptive gallants from the stage. Through the influence of classicists and the example of Racine, Shakespeare suffered some disrepute until rewriters deleted comic relief and "undue" violence from his plays. The rising middle class, having supplanted the aristocracy about the middle of the eighteenth century, resumed play going. With little taste for great poetic drama, tragedy, or the sparkling comedy of manners, they preferred something more relevant, but toppled into sentiment and melodrama.

On the continent the romantic movement stimulated the dramas of Dumas, Hugo, Schiller, and Lessing. Scribe and Sardou, apostles of the well-made play, preached the gospel of form. In America, an indigenous drama was emerging. Although better days and plays were to come for American audiences, as late as 1778, Sheridan's *The School for Scandal* had to be billed as "A Comic Lecture in Five Parts on the Pernicious Vice of Scandal." (How times have changed. Today, obscenity, profanity, and nudity seem routine).

Of the plays produced between 1650 and 1870, several still charm audiences and readers, especially the witty comedies of Sheridan and the "laughing" comedies of Goldsmith, the farce-satires of Moliere, the tragedies of Racine, and the comedies of Goldoni. To help students sample various styles of dramatic composition and to counteract the "provincialism of the present" (Santayana), summaries of sixteen plays are arranged in alphabetical order, below. To help beginning instructors select appropriate material for college and community presentation, the synopsis of each play is followed by terse notations on the settings, the number and sex of the required players, suggeted costuming, the publishers offering readily available playing editions, and for the few royalty plays, recent rates, subject to change, upward, of course. (For help with casting, directing, and producing plays, see *Guide to Play Selection*, NCTE, 1975, pp. 1-18.)

Brief Summaries of Sixteen Plays

THE BEAUX' STRATAGEM. George Farquhar. Disguised as master and man, Aimwell and Archer, two London beaux who have squandered their fortunes, go to the country to win a rustic heiress. After falling in love, both mend their ways. Comedy. 3 interiors. 11 m., 5 f., 4-6 extras. English (18th-century) costumes. Appleton-Century-Crofts *(Crofts Classics)*; Barron *(Educational Series)*; *Fountainwell* (University of California). No royalty.

THE CONTRAST. Royall Tyler. Maria, unwilling fiancee of Mr. Dimple, a scheming unfaithful fop, meets her ideal in Colonel Manly, who lacks only social grace. When her father accidentally discovers the true qualities of both suitors, he approves Maria's preference. Comedy. 3 interiors, 1 exterior. 5 m., 4 f., servants. American (18th-century) costumes. Appleton *(Representative American Plays)*. No royalty. *N.B.*: The first native American play, 1787.

THE CRITIC. Richard Brinsley Sheridan. Mr. Dangle, a highly esteemed critic, and Mr. Sneer attend the rehearsal of a tragedy by Mr. Puff. During the rehearsal the tragedy is criticized. Comedy. 2 interiors. 20 m., 9 f., extras. Elizabethan and Georgian costumes. Experienced performers needed. Barron; St. Martin's; Macmillan (London). No royalty.

THE FAN. Carlo Goldoni. Signora Candida drops her fan. Evariste, an admirer, attempting to retrieve the fan, inadvertently breaks it. Too bashful to present a replacement in person, he persuades Giannina to deliver the new fan, causing misunderstandings and other difficulties, which are eventually cleared up. Comedy. 1 interior, 1 exterior (a village square). 10 m., 4 f., Italian (18th-century) costumes. Requires sophisticated staging. French. No royalty.

FASHION. Anna Cora Mowatt Ritchie. Coached by her French maid and financed by her husband's forgeries, Mrs. Tiffany of New York aspires to be a lady of high fashion. Her daughter is saved from marriage to a continental cook posing as a count by Gertrude, the governess. In this shallow world of fashion, Gertrude is finally revealed as an heiress by Adam Trueman, Mr. Tiffany's honest farmer friend, who averts general disaster. Comedy. 6 interiors. 8 m., 5 f. Costumes of the Crinoline Period (1845). Baker; French. No royalty. *N.B.* The first professionally produced play by an American woman.

THE GOOD-NATURED MAN. Oliver Goldsmith. In love with Miss Richland, Mr. Honeywood is too diffident to press his suit until he is arrested for debt. The apprehension is made at the instigation of his uncle, who wishes to teach his nephew a lesson. Through the intercession of Miss Richland, Honeywood is released. Comedy. 3 interiors. 10 m., 5 f. English (18th-century) costumes. No royalty.

LONDON ASSURANCE. Dion Boucicault. Grace Harkaway is faced with a dilemma: she must marry Sir Harcourt Courtley or, according to her father's will, lose her inheritance. Using an assumed name, Courtley's son not only outwits his father and gains Grace but also wins paternal forgiveness. Comedy. 2 interiors, 1 exterior. 9m., 3 f. English costumes. French. No royalty.

MINE HOSTESS (Variant titles: *The Mistress of the Inn, Mirandola, La Logandiera)*. Carlo Goldoni. Challenged by a cynical cavalier, the hostess of an inn, Mirandola, forces him to succumb to her charms. Then, rejecting him and two other high-born suitors, she selects Fabrizio, a faithful servant, as her husband. Comedy. 2 interiors. 5 m., 1 f. Italian (18th-century) costumes. French. Royalty $25.00.

THE MISANTHROPE. Jean B. Moliere. To counteract the duplicity and flattery of the social set, Alceste speaks blunt truth always. Exposing the triteness of a sonnet by Oronte, his rival for Celimene's hand, he offends the versifier. Interrogated by marshals whose duty is to discourage duels, Alceste refuses to retract. Nevertheless, he satisfies Oronte by saying that in every other way he respects his rival. Turning his reforming zeal on Celimene, he charges the charming widow with coquetry and malicious gossip. Philinte, a philosophical friend, pleads with Alceste to mend his speech. Rejecting this "contemptible" advice, Alceste loses a lawsuit and his temper, the latter when he hears Cilimene's scathing comments about all her suitors,

including him. He renounces the world to live where simple honesty can prevail. Comedy. 1 interior. 8 m., 3 f. French (17th-century) costumes. Baker; Doubleday (*Classic Theatre*); Dramatists; Harcourt, Brace and World. Royalty: consult publisher; *e.g.*, for the Richard Wilbur translation the fee ranges from $25.00 to $35.00.

THE MISER. (Variant title: *L-Avare)* Jean B. Moliere. Harpagon, a miser, is in love with the dowry of Marianne, the girl his son hopes to wed. In addition, he plots to marry off his lovely daughter to a wealthy old man. Exploiting his greed, the young people bring this conniving miser to his senses. Comedy with farcical episodes. 1 interior. 11 m., 4 f. French (17th-century) costumes. Baker; Dramatists; French. No royalty.

PHAEDRA. (Variant title: *Phedre*) Jean Racine. Hearing that her husband, Theseus, is dead, Phaedra reveals her love for Hippolytus, a stepson, who scorns her advances. When Theseus returns alive, vengeful Phaedra has Hippolytus accused. About to escape with Aricia, his sweetheart, Hippolytus is trapped and slain. Then, taking poison, Phaedra confesses and dies. Tragedy. 1 interior. 3 m., 5 f., extras. Classic Grecian costumes. Appleton; Barron; Chandler. No royalty.

THE RIVALS. Richard Brinsley Sheridan. Bob Acres, a country squire, finds himself the unwilling rival of Captain Jack Absolute for the hand of Lydia Languish. Duped by romances, Lydia will not marry Jack unless his father, Sir Anthony, and her aunt and guardian, Mrs. Malaprop, object. (The latter's hilarious misuse of words is the source of the term *malapropism*.) The duelling preparations, supervised by fiery Sir Lucius O'Trigger, are sidesplitting. No blood is shed. Love triumphs in Valentine fasion. Comedy-farce. 4 exteriors, 5 interiors. 9 m., 4 f. English (18th-century) costumes. Appleton; Baker; Barron; Clarendon Club; French; Heritage; Limited Editions; Macmillan (London). No royalty.

THE SCHOOL FOR SCANDAL. Richard Brinsley Sheridan. Sir Peter Teazle is continually quarreling with his young wife. After discovering that his "respectable" nephew, Joseph Surface, is a villain, but that the ne'er-do-well Charles Surface is an honorable man, Sir Peter and his wife are reconciled. Comedy. 7 interiors. 12 m., 4 f., servants. English (18th-century) costumes. Appleton; Baker; Bantam; Barron; Blackie (London); French; Heritage; Macmillan (London); University of London Press. No royalty.

SHE STOOPS TO CONQUER. Oliver Goldsmith. Marlow and Hastings, young Londoners, set out to visit Mr. Hardcastle, an old friend of Sir Charles Marlow's, and the father of Kate, a charming daughter. Losing their way, they inquire at an inn. An habitue, Tony Lumpkin—stepson of Mr. Hardcastle and a rustic practical joker—directs them to a nearby "inn," actually Hardcastle's "castle." Mistaking Kate for a barmaid, the ordinarily bashful Marlow flirts with her. Taking advantage of his misunderstanding, Kate stoops to conquer a husband. Hastings wins the hand of Constance Neville, the ward of Mrs. Hardcastle, a foolish matron exploited by her uncouth son, Tony. Sir Charles Marlow's surprise visit clears up "the mistakes of a night," the play's subtitle, and satisfies the affronted "innkeeper" that young Marlow deserves Kate's love. Laughing comedy. 1 exterior, 3 interiors. 7 m., 4 f., servants. English (18th-century) costumes. Appleton; Baker; Bantam; Barron; French; Limited Editions Club. No royalty.

THE WAY OF THE WORLD. William Congreve. To win Millamant, Mirabell plots to have Lady Wishfort, Millamant's guardian, fall in love with Sir Rowland (actually Mirabell's disguised servant). Although the intrigue is exposed, Lady Wishfort forgives the principals because Mirabell has thwarted Fainfall's scheme to secure the Wishfort fortune. Comedy. 1 exterior, 2 interiors. 6 m., 9 f., extras. English Restoration costumes. Appleton; Barron; Chandler; University of Nebraska Press. No royalty.

THE WOULD-BE GENTLEMAN. (Variant titles: *The Bourgeois Gentleman, The Middleclass Gentleman, The Merchant Gentleman, The Prodigious Snob*). Jean B. Moliere. M. Jourdain, a rich merchant, aspires to be a gentleman of fashion. Exploited by all professing to help him, he is "the fool who gets slapped." Although he forbids his daughter's marriage to Cleante, who modestly declines to be called a gentleman, Jourdain approves of her wedding to a Grand Turk (actually, Cleante in disguise, who has offered to make the gull a high dignitary). Satiric comedy-farce. 1 interior. 11 m., 4 f., extras. French (17th-century) costumes. Baker; Barron. No royalty.

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FRANK S. ZEPEZAUER

THE MAD HATTER LECTURES ON THE TOPIC SENTENCE

TOPIC SENTENCES! Topic sentences! Got to have them. Got to use them. But from the little wretches who crowd our classrooms, how to get them?

Simple, I say. You must have a *feel* for the topic. Really a matter of topic *sentience*.

That won't do, you say? I must stick to the topic. What was it? You say the topic is the topic. And you call *me* mad?

All right, have it your own way. You shall have all my sneaky tricks. Like this one, my favorite, and the little wretches love it, too. They are such opinion lovers. Have millions of them. Rattle them off all the time.

Now...when you teach nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs...you *do* teach them, don't you? Doesn't everybody?

When you teach them, I say, teach them two kinds, the descriptive kind and the opinion kind. You know: "green" or "little" describe; "mean" or "happy" offer opinion.

You can make all sorts of lists, some with one kind, some with the other kind, and some mixing the two together. Or you can make the wretches prepare their own lists: "Now get busy," you say sternly, "and write all the opinion words that pop into your head and you may not giggle or snicker or point fingers at each other."

Or you can ask them to find opinion words in their reading.

Here's a sample list. I shall italicize the opinion words to emphasize my point:

Nouns: *super-star*, football player, public speaker, *rabble rouser*, teacher, *task master*, *prejudice*, attitude.

Adjectives: *strict*, tall, *generous*, young, *angry*, bald.

Verbs: *insult*, speak, *encourage*, offer, *cheat*, write.

Adverbs: *dangerously*, rapidly *foolishly*, repeatedly, *aggressively*, slowly.

What's that you say? All words have a touch of opinion?

Right, of course, but some, don't you think, seem more obviously opinion. Can't you say to the little wretches, "Take 'rabble rouser' and 'speaker.' Which word needs more proving?"

And once you introduce the word, "prove," you have snared the little devils. Ask them to select some opinion words from their lists. Then ask them to write down at least three things (must be three, you know; establishes a good habit), three things, I say, that someone must know in order to use the opinion word properly. What three things, for example must you know about a supposedly *careless* person before you can fairly call him "careless?"

You can, of course, reverse the process. Give them three sentences which describe obviously careless actions. Ask them to supply a word or phrase that characterizes those actions. If they need more help...don't they always?...give them clusters of fact statements along with a list of opinion words and have them match words to sentences. Also a good way to sneak in some vocabulary building, don't you think?

Incidentally, did I tell you that the Green Bay Packers selected Eddie Lee Ivery on the first round? What kind of

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sentence is that? A *top pick* sentence, of course.

Where were we? Oh, yes. Opinion *words*. So much fun, those, but the school board insists that we teach *sentences*.

Ah, but *we* know, don't we, that topic sentences merely provide a framework for opinion words. So go ahead. Have the little wretches construct sentences *around* opinion words. Wouldn't *that* be creative? Look, for example:

Jane is a *super-star*.
Joe *insulted* me.
Harry acted *foolishly*.
Geraldine is *generous*.

One of you oppressed, paper-burdened slaves has offered a name for the opinion word which activates the topic sentence. He calls it a "controlling idea." Nice term, that, when you think about it. Says that everything you say thereafter takes direction from a key term in the topic sentence.

You can, of course, connect this put-the-opinion-word-in-the-sentence activity to your lessons on sentence patterns. You must have noticed that many topic sentences fall into the linking verb pattern: "Peter *is a rabble-rouser*. STAR WARS *is great*. School *is a necessary evil*." Goes on like that incessantly.

Now you have to be alert. Those sneaky wretches often put descriptive terms behind those linking verbs. But you won't let them get away with it. Often ruins their style: "The grass was wet. The room was dark. Her hair was blond." Indeed! Rap their muddy knuckles for such cheek! Who do they think they are, Ernest Hemingway?

No, no, no. Insist that linking verb patterns work best at expressing opinions. Make them write that down in their notebooks. They'll love you for the rest of their lives, and in your old age you shall receive mountains of thank-you letters full of peppy action verbs.

Speaking of English teachers in well-deserved retirement, did you know that one of our colleagues was retired prematurely because, as we say, he went around the bend? Poor fellow always interrupted those devilishly important faculty meetings by yelling, "Stick to the topic, stick to the topic!" They finally put him before a judge. The sadistic jurist sentenced the man to write "topic" 100 times on the gaol blackboard. Now don't you agree that such a penalty would be a "*topic*" sentence?"

Reminds me of those judges who sent men to Devil's Island. Only those, I suppose, were *tropic* sentences.

Horrible experience, that. And speaking of experience, do you ever have your little wretches list *their* experiences? Quite simple. Ask them to note down all the silly or scary or funny things they did...or saw...or heard about. Away they go, filling reams of paper and upsetting your budget director. Then say with curious innocence, "What does all this add up to? Would you sum it up for me in one sentence?"

Or simpler yet, let them ramble on about their experiences. They love to do that; have this odd pre-occupation with what is happening in their own lives. So tell them to write freely, openly, without fear of ugly red marks. Soon their percolating little minds will spill out a generalization of some sort, usually at the end in some form of conclusion: "Boy, was I a klutz." *Now*, you can do a little nudging. Ask them to take that observation and place it at the *beginning* of a rewrite; something like: "I've been pretty klutzy at times." Looks remarkably like a topic sentence, doesn't it?

Another sneaky variation is to search their freely expressed comments for a random generalization. When you find one, put a "why" or "prove it" in the margin. Then ask them to respond to those brief challenges on a new paper. Gets little essays, don't you see? At least, most of the time; that is, if you teach in Wonderland.

Which reminds me that I am having tea. Always have very distinguished company, if I do say so myself. Except for that uppity girl who chances by now and then. She asks all those impossible questions and expects logical answers, as if we inhabited a logical world!

Now, the rabbit, on the other hand, does things quite differently. Just today he said...well, he was supposed to say it yesterday, but he was late, you know...just today, he said, "Ah, the topic sentence, also known as the 'thesis.' Both words from Greek, y'see, having something to do with *placing forth*. Romans did the same with the 'exposition.' Same notion, really. One almost gets the impression of slapping notices on the wall. Lets the world know you have thrown down the gauntlet."

He went on like that, did the rabbit, interminably. Very heavy stuff. I would define him as "topic sententious."

Ah. But you still wonder about "why" and "prove it." Very useful terms, those. "Why" will get you *reasons* and

"prove it" will get you *facts*. And lurking behind each of them you will find a most extraordinary term. I refer to "should" and its negation, "should not."

"Should/should not" most immediately associates with "why." Let me explain while I pour some more tea. We shall assume you plan to win votes for your candidate, and so you wave before an ill-informed electorate a placard bearing the message, "Vote for Billingsgate."

Now, if you have an analytical turn of mind, consider what in essence you are asserting. Are you not saying to the citizens that their vote will prove *valuable* to them? Then are you not really saying, "You *should* vote for Billingsgate," using "should" in this sense as an appeal to their interests?

You would prefer, I am sure, that a properly subordinated public would recognize your wisdom and station and accede to your demand without question. But many of them fancy themselves democrats and will, upon hearing you say, "You should vote for Billingsgate" growl back the blunt question, "Why?" Then you must, I'm afraid, go through the tedious business of unfolding reasons that will persuade them to act in the perfectly responsible manner you had in mind.

Thus, "should/should not" provokes "why," and "why" provokes reasons, and you will then find that you teased out a whole series of topic sentences. Works this way. Let us continue with noble Billingsgate. Thus

> (you should) vote for Billingsgate.
> Why?
> (for these obvious reasons)
> 1. He has established a fine record in parliament.
> 2. He has shown valor during emergencies.
> 3. He demonstrated not only political skill, but intellectual achievement.

Now, don't you see that you have the structure of an essay? For can you not proceed with further challenges expressed by "prove it?" Thus, you will have

> 1. He has established a fine record in parliament.
> (prove it), etc.

and you can now merrily detail all those devastatingly conclusive facts that you have assembled. If that doesn't persuade those democratic blackguards, we should restore absolute monarchy.

Ah, you will object (I don't know why you insist on these impertinent observations)—you will object that the provocative "why" only calls for the thesis of the *persuasive* essay and you are obliged by an outraged public to teach your little wretches simpler topic sentences such as "Geraldine is generous" and "Carter is incompetent" and "Macbeth suffers from a vivid imagination."

But don't you agree that such assertions *also* attempt to persuade? Consider, if you please, just exactly what we do in such efforts. Do we not seek some *action* from our audience? After all, why identify the virtues of Billingsgate, our favorite example, if you don't want your listeners to act properly in the polling booth? And, in our complex world, action is so marvelously simple. I mean, at the point just before you actually *do* something, you are reduced to two basic choices: either you will do it or you will not do it. And something in your experience has demonstrated that one of the choices will prove more valuable to you.

Does not the same apply then, when you ask someone to grant you belief or agreement? Do they not *act*? I mean, they will either acknowledge that you have a case that compels their belief or they will conclude that you are a blithering idiot.

Lovely Geraldine shall demonstrate my point. You affirm solemnly that "Geraldine is generous." Now, if your audience will not accept the truth of Geraldine's generosity *merely* because you state it, you must then *persuade* them that your case is valid. Thus, in effect, you say

> (you should believe that) Geraldine is generous.
> Why?
> 1. Because she gives money to all sorts of charities.
> 2. Because she offers her help where it is needed.
> 3. Because she gives up her own time to listen patiently to others.

And from all these *reasons* you can again proceed to *facts* by anticipating the challenge of "prove it"

> 1. Because she gives money to all sorts of charities.
> (prove it)
> Well, she did A and B and C.

Thus, *all* topic sentences, don't you see, have persuasive intent.

My, I've gone on about this. Prefer really to meditate on this fanciful progression. Now, below you have a garden pick. And above it you place an ice pick. And finally above *that* you place a tooth pick.

We know, don't we, what we have now. Of course. A top *pick* sentence.

But once again to your scribbling little wretches. You can elicit all sorts of nicely structured writing by asking them to build sentences around the words "should" or "should not." In the planning stages you might have them spell out what we have discovered is implicit; that is, you would have them write their topic setences in this fashion:

> (you should believe that) Gilbert is industrious.

And then have them deliberately inscribe the challenge "why" followed by this parenthetical statement"

> (there are several reasons why you should believe this assertion)

or something like that.

A bit artificial, I admit, but consider it as scaffolding that serves while writers build the real structure. We toss away all kinds of rubbish on our way to a final draft, don't we? And if we require the stumbling writers to make clear in the beginning that what they *really* say is that people *should* believe their assertions, then they will see their way to the rest of their essays by assembling the reasons for the inevitable challenge of "why."

But something else might happen. They may discover that their interest focuses on one of their *reasons*. Say one of the wretches doggedly insists that

> We should more vigorously enforce the vehicle code for bicycles.

And now, under your enlightened tutelage, he has assumed a "why" and proceeds with

> 1. Because bicycle accidents

have greatly increased in the past five years.

You may follow with the second challenge, which is "prove it" and it may happen that he will decide to write an essay with the thesis

Bicycle accidents have greatly increased in the past five years.

Thus, by having them list all their reasons to an initial should/should not thesis, you are also, in a very sneaky way, eliciting from them a series of topic sentences. For a reason *is* a topic sentence, don't you agree? And even if they discard the original should/should not thesis, they can still build an essay around one of the reasons.

Ah ha, you say. The "prove it" challenge calls for facts and the little wretches never have enough. Of course they don't. Nobody does. We all love facts, but few of us have the industry to dig them out.

So turn the tables. *Give* them facts.

Give them lists of related facts and ask them to supply the missing topic sentence.

Or find some magazine article and remove the facts. See if the wretches can puzzle out the missing generalizations.

Or put the missing generalizations on one sheet and the facts on the other and have them re-assemble the article.

Or give them a cluster of related facts and ask them, "What does these mean?"

Or, simply, explode with astonished indignation, "What? You can not prove that statement? March immediately to the library, inform the librarian of your insufferable ignorance and ask humbly where you might find some facts to strengthen your assertion. No facts, indeed!"

Be cross with them, I say. You American teachers fail to take a firm hand. Read the beginning of OLIVER TWIST or HARD TIMES for tips on dealing with snivelling youth. More gruel and baths in cold water will nip this so-called education crisis in the bud. No facts, indeed!

This business of firm handling always reminds me, for some reason, of the Arabs. During the recent oil crisis we sent a new ambassador to the Saudis. The man took on a frightening case of nerves. The episode does have a topic, you know. The topic? Sent tense.

Poor man had to search out the oil minister near some new wells. Had no accommodations there. So the Saudis forwarded portable living quarters. The topic now? Sent tents.

You see, I must conclude. Must be the tea. I fancy you found all that "should/should not" business of some use. Gets an enormous flow of writing, those words.

But some other words also send the wretches toward those earnestly sought for topic sentences. Think, for example, of "than" as in "better than" or "bigger than" or "worse than." Use them and you proceed to a comparison essay. Same thing happens with "similar to" and "different from." Very handy words. Will keep a tea party going for hours.

What's that you say: What is a mad *hatter* doing talking about topic sentences?

Well, you don't think making *hats* drove me mad, do you?

Not in the least. Taught English before I tumbled down into Wonderland. Would drive you mad, too, if you taught English.

What's that? You do? You are?

Oh, then, come quickly, and join me for tea.

■

GWENDOLYN & ME

I am feeder, fondler,
establisher of places,
determiner of times,
water giver, light provider,
punisher—say I—
man the master:
come.

Haunch, tongue, whiskers,
quiver, yawn, strutting,
tail—says she—
I am cat; I come
when I please.

—David Lieberman

SOLIPSISM:
THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF
NARCISSISM

There once was a group that consisted
Of solipsists met to unite, they insisted;
But they soon fell to -isms
And broke into schisms,

—Edward Proffitt
Manhattan College
Bronx, New York

A NEW *ER* COLUMN

EVALUATING NOVELS FOR YOUNG ADULTS

DURING THE LAST few years, my colleagues and I have read and evaluated countless books written and published for young adolescents and teenagers. Occasionally we have found a new novel suitable for class discussion; rarely are we happy with the selection.

We choose our books on the basis of merit, as we understand it. Does the language and style challenge our students' use of English? Will we be able to use the book to enrich their vocabulary? Are the characters believable, human, three-dimensional? Do they represent a variety of human experience and emotion? Is there a theme which challenges student perception of reality? Will our students experience vicariously a valid human conflict? If the theme or the subject matter deals with tragedy and unhappiness, does the story have a purpose which will engage the minds and feelings of our students?

As English teachers, we have standards for quality writing. We might prefer one author to another and we might argue about the validity of an author's point of view. We disagree often about the suitability of teaching a novel at a certain grade level. Some of us find one novel easy to teach, others have difficulty teaching the same novel to a specific class or group. We tailor our questions to the age and ability of our students. We willingly tape books and use a variety of aids so that the slower student can master the material. However, we rebel at using material which neither challenges nor instructs.

This column is in response to the feelings of frustration which so many of us experience. We receive monthly packets of paperback novels from publishers. Some of us find time to read them; others simply put them in classroom libraries. Because we believe that many YA books lack the qualities we look for in a novel, this column has been inaugurated. We welcome reviewers whose responses differ with ours as well as those who share our views.

Our guest columnist for this issue is John Higgins of York College, CUNY.

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ALL THAT GLITTERS IS NOT LITERATURE

John Higgins

A recent *English Journal* article listed seventeen young adult novels of the 1970's, nearly all realistic, that the writers of the article feel will become "classics of the genre."[1] Classics? Good grief! To how many YA books can even the term *art* be applied, let alone *classic? The English Journal* list includes such works as Judy Blume's *Are You There, God? It's Me, Margaret* (Bradbury, 1970), Sue Ellen Bridgers' *Home Before Dark* (Knopf, 1976), Alice Childress' *A Hero Ain't Nothin' But a Sandwich* (Coward, McCann, 1973), Rosa Guy's *Edith Jackson* (Viking, 1978), and Mildred C. Taylor's *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (Dial, 1976). That these works should be acclaimed classics reveals the poverty of literary quality in the whole genre of YA realistic fiction: a poverty sometimes of content, sometimes of craft, often of both.

Since the advent of the new realism, reviewers, librarians, and teachers have tended to laud novels on non-literary grounds: tape-recorder realism, treatment of hitherto taboo subjects, social or self-help messages, or ability to interest the poor reader. None of these in itself makes a book literature in the sense that we English teachers use the term: writing that is "notable for literary form on expression" (Webster).

It is that form, that artistry—or too often its absence—that I believe many of us have overlooked in our desire to praise books with worthy themes or "with it" story lines.

Look at characterization. In their effort to appeal to the "typical" teenager, too many authors have created stereotypical characters. Blume's Margaret = her Deenie = her Karen (in *It's Not the End of the World)* = Lauren in Paula Danziger's *Can You Sue Your Parents for Malpractice,* and so on into infinity. In what way is each of these characters a unique individual, different from the others or from our stereotyped image of a teenager?

Other novels, such as *Roll of Thunder* and *Edith Jackson,* suffer from too many undifferentiated young secondary characters—siblings and friends identified by name and role (Bessie, Suzy, Millie, Ruby, Phyllisia, Debra)—but not etched sharply

enough to emerge from the background as flesh-and-blood humans.

As damaging as poor characterization is an author's lack of narrative control resulting in inconsistency of narrative point of view. Far from being merely a technical nit for a cranky critic's picking, such inconsistency can damage our understanding of or identification with the protagonist, or even our belief in the protagonist as a real person. *A Hero ain't Nothin....* for instance, is skillfully and cleverly assembled, but diffusion of its point of view among eleven narrators prevents us from ever feeling that we know Benjie, the protagonist, closely enough. On stage for less than one-third of the book, he comes across more as a case history than as a real person.

In *Home Before Dark,* Bridgers yanks us away from the point of view of Stella, the main character, in at least two important points when we should know what she is thinking: when she gives her first romantic kiss to the worthless Rodney and when her mother dies suddenly and is buried. Both of these episodes are seen through the eyes of secondary, sometimes insignificant, characters. We have been cheated. In *Edith Jackson,* Guy cheats us in a similar way, by withholding significant information that Edith knows and that we too should know, since she is the narrator. Only when she tells other characters do we find that she is pregnant and, later, that she has decided on an abortion.

In the same novel Guy is guilty of another control flaw, inconsistency of language. In telling her own story, Edith at times uses highly literate, even literary, language. ("And though it was true that her mother, pretty in her dressing gown, with her curly hair bunned up on her head, looked different from my mother with her hair matted from sweat, when she lay dying...." "She stood in the little hall, her hands in her jacket pockets, her eyes searching, her full lips riding back over her pretty teeth.") And she always remembers to use the possessive case before a gerund. All this from a poorly educated teenager who elsewhere narrates, "Fire, like one of them monsters...," "Then my heart swoll," "Who we?" "I had no kinda time," and "Folks supposed to like you for the way you are." Such inconsistencies, apparent throughout the book, are simply not possible from the mouth of a believable character.

Narrative control also means command of focus, pace, and plausibility of events. In *Roll of Thunder* Taylor lets her focus drift away from the young people until at the end they are merely bystanders at an adult conflict. Guy throws in event after event, soap-opera style, with no quiet valleys in the narrative pace to make the peaks stand out. Bridgers, a little too conveniently and unconvincingly, has Stella's mother killed by lightning so the plot can move on.

Related to pace and focus is the ratio of reflective thought and description to dialog and action narration. In life people do not merely talk and act; they notice and are influenced by countless details of their surroundings and of other persons' behavior. The style of Blume (and her imtators, such as Paula Danziger) gives us merely a TV-like script of little more than dialog and stage directions. As a result Blume's novels remain skeletal. We hear a Blume novel, but we do not *see* it or, I believe, *feel* it. (In *It's Not the End of the World,* for example, instead of letting us infer Garfa's mood by descriptive detail, or even letting us know how Karen inferred it, Blume merely writes, "I could see how disappointed Garfa was...."— Let us see it, Judy; give us an image, a metaphor, a symbol!

If all these "classics" are so flawed, then is there any recent well-crafted YA fiction? Yes. Read or reread, for example, Virginia Hamilton's *M.C. Higgins, the Great* (Macmillan, 1974)— inexplicably missing from *The English Journal* classics list—and Richard Peck's *Father Figure* (Viking, 1978). Each of these novels is rich in narrative and descriptive detail that makes it come alive. The characters, both main and secondary, stand out as individuals. We remember M.C. and the girl who enters his life, and the grandmother and the waitress in Peck's book, long after we finish reading. Each plot is well paced, with peaks and valleys, and contains a cause-effect sequence gradually rising to a climax that is plausible because we have come to know and believe in the protagonist through the author's use of detail, image and tight control of point of view. Moreover, Hamilton has enriched *M.C. Higgins* with a sense of mystery and deeper levels of meaning through her use of symbols such as the pole and the waste heap. The writing styles of these two novels are not merely different from that of a Blume or a Guy; they are markedly better.

I do not advocate immolating Blume *et al.* on a pyre of their books. Their novels are good for recreational or remedial reading, and for their sociological or bibliotherapeutic messages. But let us not call them literature, any more than we would call an Irving Wallace or Erich Segal novel literature.

Young adults deserve literature of the highest quality. Even young children's literature has its *Charlotte's Web* and a few other works that can be called literary art. Memo to authors, editors, and publishers: Get cracking!

NOTE

'Linda Bachelder and others, "Looking Backward: Trying to Find the Classic Young Adult Novel," *EJ,* 69 (September 1980), 86-89.

WRITING

I write what I live
I write what I live
But I haven't got time to write—

So I live a little less,
I live a little less,
In order to write some more.

And as I do this
As I do this
Something really terrible happens:

I have more time to write—
But, much less to say.
Is it better, the other way?

—Eliane Sherman
Jamaica Learning Center
Jamaica, New York